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**RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND
RELATED FORMS OF INTOLERANCE: FOLLOW-UP TO
AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DURBAN DECLARATION
AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION**

**Letter dated 26 June 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the
Permanent Mission of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to
the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the United Nations
High Commissioner for Human Rights**

I have the honour to forward you a copy of the most recently updated version of the OIC Observatory Report on Islamophobia* as a contribution of the General Secretariat of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 62/154, entitled "Combating defamation of religions", in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the implementation of that resolution, including on the possible correlation between defamation of religions and the upsurge in incitement and hatred, to the Assembly at its sixty-third session.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference kindly requests the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner to circulate the present report as a document of the Human Rights Council.

(Signed): Mojtaba AMIRI VAHID
Chargé d'affaires ad interim

* The report is available on file in the Secretariat. The summary is reproduced as received and in the language of submission only in the annex to the present document.

Annex

OIC OBSERVATORY REPORT ON ISLAMOPHOBIA

Executive summary

One of the major challenges of today's world is the issue of Islamophobia. In recent years, this phenomenon has assumed serious proportions and has become a major cause of concern for the Muslim world. As a result of this rising trend, Muslims, in the West in particular, are being stereotyped, profiled, and subjected to different forms of discriminatory treatment. The most sacred symbols of Islam are being defiled and denigrated in an insulting, offensive, and contemptuous manner to incite hatred and unrest in society. While Islam, as the religion of peace and tolerance, affirms moderation and balance and rejects all forms of extremism and terrorism, the proponents of Islamophobia continue their campaign in defaming Islam and Muslims.

Against this backdrop, the Heads of State and Government, during the 3rd Extraordinary Islamic Summit held in Mecca in December 2005, adopted the OIC Ten-Year Program of Action, which inter-alia, decided to establish an Observatory at the OIC General Secretariat to raise awareness of the dangers of Islamophobia and counter it by monitoring all its forms and manifestations, in addition to initiating a structured dialogue to project the true values of Islam. The leaders also tasked the Observatory with issuing an annual report. That decision to submit the report was reiterated by the 34th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) held in Islamabad in May 2007. Accordingly, the first report of the Observatory was submitted to the Eleventh Islamic Summit Conference held in Dakar, Senegal, on March 13-14, 2008.

The Observatory Report is a collation of incidents and developments that vindicate the Ummah's concerns over the growing phenomenon of Islamophobia. It also provides an account of the activities and efforts on the part of the OIC Observatory and initiatives and efforts undertaken by the OIC Secretary General in countering Islamophobia and in bringing the issue to the forefront of the international community's agenda. It also aims to highlight and explain its dangerous repercussions on global peace and security and stress the urgent need to muster a collective political will to combat it. The present Report has been developed by elaborating the definition and causes of the phenomenon and recording incidents and developments on the issue.

The Observatory Report is presented in four main sections: (i) the conceptual part, where the term "Islamophobia" is discussed, including its definition and its root causes; (ii) recent manifestations of Islamophobia, including Islamophobic incidents and derogatory political statements as well as a few positive developments that have been observed; (iii) the activities and efforts of the Observatory and the Secretary General to counter Islamophobia; and (iv) conclusion.

The methodology in compiling the report consists of providing an account of the outcomes of international conferences, and UN documents and resolutions, as well as the collation of reports and studies by established research organizations and think-tanks, monitoring and documenting available credible reports of Islamophobic incidents. The Report's methodology has also deliberately sought to avoid reproducing overly racist slurs or excessively incendiary or confrontational language as sometimes reproduced in the Internet so as to respect sensitivities, avoid giving undue space or exposure to the elements propagating such invectives, and thereby

contribute to raising the standards of the debate on this question. The Report has focused on the Muslim world's concerns over the disturbing situation that Muslims are facing mainly in western societies, in addition to the practices of vilification of Islam in that part of the world. It also highlights the legal implications of Islamophobia by emphasizing that this phenomenon is in contradiction with the letter and spirit of several legal instruments and calls for the enactment of national legislations and international instruments to ensure protection against the defamation of religion and the elimination of all aspects of discrimination and intolerance of Muslims. The Report puts up relevant arguments on the urgent need for the international community to come up with effective legal instruments to fight this menace and affirms that the right to freedom of expression should be concomitantly exercised with its inherent responsibilities and cannot be a license to cause hurt, provoke and incite hatred, or discriminate against Muslims on the basis of their faith by defaming, denigrating, or insulting the sacred religious symbols of Islam and fomenting unrest and violence in societies.

In compiling its first report, the Observatory has taken into account the complexity of the issue of Islamophobia and the way it is perceived by its protagonists. In working to come up with a definition of Islamophobia, the report has taken into consideration the definition provided by *the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and related Intolerance*, who has defined Islamophobia as “a baseless hostility and fear vis-à-vis Islam and, as a result, a fear of, and aversion towards all Muslims or a majority of them.” In his 2007 report to the 6th session of the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Special Rapporteur stated that Islamophobia was a growing phenomenon and a matter of concern in the aftermath of the events of the 9/11.

The Observatory Report has referred to the findings of polls, studies, and reports of important international institutions to establish recognition of the rise of Islamophobia in western societies. In this respect, excerpts of the reports and findings of the *International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights* of March 2005; August 2006 *USA Today/Gallup Poll*; the Washington-based *Human Rights First 2007 Report on Islamophobia*; the *Pew Research Center Report* of September 25, 2007 and the *European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)* now known as *FRA*, were incorporated. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)'s 2007 “*Third Report on the Netherlands*” released on 12 February 2008 that provides substantiating evidence of OIC concerns on Islamophobia, has also been referred to. The ECRI report clearly shows the “dramatic” increase of Islamophobia in the Netherlands, stating that Muslims of the Netherlands have been subject to stereotyping, stigmatizing, and sometimes outright racist political statements, in addition to biased media profiling.

The Observatory Report states that Islamophobia will continue to be an issue of concern for the international community in the near future unless the international community comes up with effective measures to contain it. The Report, however, argues that the Muslim world's outcry at Islamophobic incidents, in particular the publication of the defamatory cartoons of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the unfortunate and unwarranted remarks by Pope Benedict XVI at a University in Germany on September 20, 2006, had a negative impact on the Muslim world and drew attention of its official and public opinion to the gravity of the issue.

The negative impact of the blasphemous cartoons was reflected in the OIC-initiated trilateral joint statement by the OIC Secretary General, the UN Secretary General, and the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), on February 7, 2006,

as well as in the joint statement on “*the Rights to Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Protest*” issued in Doha, Qatar, on February 25, 2006, by the Secretaries General of the UN, OIC, and League of Arab States, Qatar’s First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, and Spain’s and Turkey’s Foreign Ministers respectively. Furthermore, the OIC Secretary General’s participation in various international Conferences on inter-religious and inter-cultural tolerance, together with his meetings with Heads of State and Government, Foreign Ministers, leading academics and NGO leaders of Western countries, and Heads of International Organizations, including the United Nations, the UN Alliance of Civilizations, the EU, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe, has contributed to raising awareness of the issue of Islamophobia. The announcement by the US Government to appoint a Special Envoy to the OIC and the Vatican’s decision to reinstate the Department for Dialogue with Muslims were also considered among positive developments.

The OIC General Secretariat took a major initiative by organizing an important conference on Islamophobia, in cooperation with the Wilton Park Institution on May 2-3, 2006 in London. The significance of the Conference was highlighted by the participation of high-level representatives of OIC Member States, European governments, and international organizations, such as the UN, Council of Europe, OSCE, European Union, in addition to academics, media representatives, Muslim organizations and NGOs based in Europe. The Conference, which was addressed, among others, by the OIC Secretary General, British Minister of State, Kim Howells, and Malaysia’s High Commissioner in London acting on behalf of the OIC Summit Chairmanship, issued a report containing a number of recommendations to address the issue of Islamophobia.

The Observatory Report also took into account the important role of the Media in dealing with the issue of Islamophobia. Accordingly, the international conference jointly organized by the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the OIC General Secretariat under the title of “*the Role of Media in the Development of Tolerance and Mutual Understanding*” in Baku, Azerbaijan, on April 26-27, 2007, and attended by political leaders, prominent media professionals, and NGO members of both the Muslim world and the West, highlighted the urgent and pressing need for fair and balanced reporting and responsible political commentary in order to foster the culture of tolerance and promote mutual understanding. The Baku Conference also emphasized that freedom of expression should be linked with a sense of responsibility on the part of those exercising this freedom.

The OIC General Secretariat, in cooperation with the Georgetown University-Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal Center for Christian-Muslim Understanding in Washington DC, organized two symposiums on 20-21 September, 2007, where the OIC Secretary General addressed two interactive round-table sessions, one on “*Islamophobia and the Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*” and the other on “*the Role of the Media in West-Islam Relations*”.

The Muslim world’s concern over the growing phenomenon of Islamophobia was voiced very strongly by the Heads of State and Government and leaders of delegations at the 11th OIC Summit held in Dakar, Senegal, on March 13-14, 2008. In their statements, the leaders and the OIC Secretary General condemned the campaign of hatred and intolerance of Islam and discrimination towards Muslims.

Since the submission of the first Observatory Report and immediately in the wake of the 11th OIC Summit, a major Islamophobic incident that shocked and dismayed all Muslims and the international community was the release of the film “Fitna” denigrating the Holy Qur’an. This was preceded by the reprint of cartoons of the Prophet (PBUH) by seventeen Danish newspapers. Condemning the release of the film in the strongest terms, the OIC Secretary General described it as a deliberate act of discrimination against Muslims, incitement of hatred, and an act of defamation of religions solely designed to incite and provoke unrest among peoples of different religious beliefs, and to jeopardize world peace and stability. He warned the international community against the repercussions of this serious development. He also took up the matter with the Dutch Government, urging it to initiate legal action against the acts committed under the pretext of freedom of expression.

The Observatory Report concludes that the relentless campaign of hatred and intolerance of Islam and Muslims by vested individuals and ultra-right wing groups notwithstanding, there is now a general awareness in the international community on Islamophobia’s serious implications. Western Governments, NGOs, and the civil society have started to take serious note of the concerns of the Muslim world over the dangers of defamation of Islam and have shown willingness to engage in dialogue. The Report also shows that these developments still fall short of the actions and political will needed to address the issue in decisive and clear terms, since Islamophobes remain free to carry on their attacks in the absence of necessary legal measures to curb the misuse or abuse of the right to freedom of expression. The Report therefore concludes that OIC Member States may continue to vigorously pursue their efforts to combat Islamophobia at both multilateral and bilateral levels.

Finally, it is to be noted that the Report’s conclusions are based on the Observatory’s research findings and analysis of the facts and figures collated throughout its monitoring activities of key international and regional bodies, agencies, internet websites, and reports.
